

Washington, D.C. -- U.S. Rep. Charlie Wilson (OH-6) today backed legislation that will address the soaring price of college tuition and remove other obstacles that make it difficult for qualified students to attend college.

The House approved the College Opportunity and Affordability Act (H.R. 4137) by a vote of 354 to 58. The bill would reform and strengthen the nation's higher education programs to ensure that they operate in the best interests of students and families.

"Democrats have made college education a priority," Rep. Wilson said. "We need a well-trained workforce to attract new jobs and to grow our economy."

The bill would address the rising cost of higher education by providing consumers with comprehensive information on college pricing through better information from both the Department of Education and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. That information would be available on a new website. The bill also requires that states maintain their commitments to higher education funding.

The legislation also strengthens provisions previously approved by the House to avoid conflicts of interest in the student loan programs. The bill's new provisions include requiring better consumer disclosures and protections on private student loans. Together these protections form a Bill of Rights for college consumers.

In addition, the College Opportunity and Affordability Act would:

- Streamline the federal student financial aid application process;

- Make textbook costs more manageable for students by, among other things, helping them plan for textbook expenses in advance of each semester;

- Allow students to receive year-round Pell Grant scholarships;
- Strengthen college readiness and support programs for minority and low-income students;
- Increase college aid and support programs for veterans and military families;
- Improve safety on college campuses and help schools recover and rebuild after a disaster;
- Ensure equal college opportunities and fair learning environments for students with disabilities; and
- Strengthen our nation's workforce and economic competitiveness by boosting science, technology, and foreign language educational opportunities.

H.R. 4137 is a comprehensive reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, the primary federal law aimed at expanding college access for low- and middle-income students. The bill is supported by a broad coalition of students, colleges and universities, consumer rights advocacy groups, minority organizations, and more.

The legislation is the second major step that the new Democratic Congress has taken to make college more affordable and accessible for all qualified students. Last year, Congress enacted into law a \$20 billion increase in college financial aid over the next five years, the largest increase in student aid since the G.I. Bill of 1944.